

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01

EB-07 /067 W

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R 201608Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4708

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EGEN PINT BE

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER TO HOLD ECONOMIC AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
UNTIL NEW MINISTER SELECTED

REF: BRUSSELS 7342

1. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS' OFFICE HAS ANNOUNCED INFORMALLY THAT TINDEMANS HIMSELF WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ECONOMIC AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO UNTIL SUCCESSOR TO ANDRE OLEFFE, WHO DIED ON AUGUST 18, IS NAMED. THIS ANNOUNCEMENT EXPRESSED HOPE THAT OLEFFE'S REPLACEMENT MIGHT BE NAMED BY END OF THIS MONTH, BUT MOST OBSERVERS THINK TINDMANS IS MORE LIKELY TO TAKE UNTIL MID-SEPTEMBER TO CHOOSE REPLACEMENT.

2. PM TINDEMANS TOLD ME AUGUST 19 THAT HE WOULD BE RETURNING TO VACATION SITE IN FRANCE TO CONTINUE WORK ON EC "WISE MAN" REPORT. HE SAID REPLACING OLEFFE WILL BE DIFFICULT SINCE NONE OF COMPETENT CANDIDATES HAVE CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT OF
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WALLOON WORKERS WHICH WAS ESSENTIAL ASSET OF OLEFFE IN

THIS KEY JOB. HE INDICATED REPACEMTN MIGHT NOT BE CHOSEN SOON.

3. SPECULATION NOW CENTERS ON EITHER OF TWO WAYS TO FILL THE VACANCY: -- MOVE AN EXPERIENCED CABINET MEMBER FROM HIS PRESENT MINISTRY TO ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, RESHUFFLING AS MANY OTHER MINISTRIES AS NECESSARY TO OBTAIN AN ACCEPTABLE NEW BALANCE OF PARTY, LINGUISTIC AND REGIONAL FORCES; OR -- GO OUTSIDE THE PRESENT CABINET FOR SOMEONE WHOSE POLITICAL PROFILE IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF OLEFFE AND WHO COULD BECOME ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MINISTER WITHOUT NECESSITATING ANY FURTHER RESHUFFLE. OLEFFE WAS NON-MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, WALLOON, MEMBER OF FRANCOPHONE SOCIAL-CHRISTIAN PARTY (PSC), FORMER PRESIDENT OF INFLUENTIAL FRANCOPHONE CHRISTIAN WORKER MOVEMENT, AND FORMER CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL BANKING COMMISSION.

4. COMMENT: AS INDICATED BY TINEEMANS COMMENT, OLEFFE'S REPLACEMENT POSES REAL PROBLEM FOR GOVERNMENT AT TIME IT FACES DIFFICULT DECISIONS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES. LACK OF SUITABLE OUTSIDE CANDIDATE COULD SPUR JOCKEYING AMONG COALITION FORCES FOR THIS DEY POST. IF TINDEMANS PROCRASTINATES IN FILLING THIS JOB IT MAY GIVE RISE TO INTRA-COALITION CONTROVERSY WHICH COULD SAP GOVERNMENT'S STRENGTH IN PARLIAMENT. RENNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, DEATHS, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS, GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BRUSSE07432
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750288-0543
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750833/aaaabcet.tel
Line Count: 85
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BRUSSELS 7342
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 APR 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <07 OCT 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIME MINISTER TO HOLD ECONOMIC AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO UNTIL NEW MINISTER SELECTED
TAGS: EGEN, PINT, BE, (OLEFFEE, ANDRE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006